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*Library of Congress,
from Samuel A. Green.*

A BRITISH ACCOUNT OF THE BATTLE OF LEXINGTON;
AND THE LAST MEETING IN THE DOWSE
LIBRARY AT No. 30 TREMONT ST., BOSTON.

AT a meeting of the MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, held in Boston, on April 8, 1897, Dr. SAMUEL A. GREEN made the following remarks:—

In connection with the memorable events of April 19, 1775, I will read the following copy of a letter written soon after that date by an English officer of rank stationed in Boston to the venerable Cadwallader Colden, of New York. Necessarily his information, however inaccurate it may have been, was picked up from hearsay, as he took no part in the deeds of that day. Naturally it differs much from the accepted accounts of the expedition, and without doubt was gathered from the various reports in circulation at the time. In our army during the late Rebellion tales based on mere rumors of the camp were known as "sink stories." Occasionally, however, such reports, inexact as they may be, throw rays of side light, and help to clear up doubts and uncertainties; and for that reason they have an interest, if not a value.

The writer of the letter, Lieutenant-Colonel Abercrombie, was mortally wounded while storming the works on Bunker Hill at the head of the grenadiers, and died on June 24. He was a gallant officer, and a brother of General Sir Ralph Abercrombie. Mr. Frothingham, in his "History of the Siege of Boston" (p. 195), says: "When the men were bearing him

away from the field, he begged them to spare his old friend Putnam. 'If you take General Putnam alive,' he said, 'don't hang him; for he's a brave man.'" In Trumbull's well-known painting of the battle, Colonel Abercrombie is represented as having fallen on the ground in the heat of the action, where he is lying near General Warren.

To the courtesy of ex-Governor John D. Long, now the Secretary of the Navy, I am indebted for a copy of the letter which is given below:—

NAVY DEPARTMENT, OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY,
WASHINGTON, March 31, 1897.

DEAR DOCTOR, — I enclose you copy of a letter written soon after the Battle of Lexington, giving the British view. The original is in the possession of General Ruggles, who is now the Adjutant-General of the U. S. Army.

Very truly yours,

JOHN D. LONG.

DR. SAMUEL ABBOTT GREEN,
Librarian, Massachusetts Historical Society,
Boston, Massachusetts.

BOSTON May 2d 1775

DEAR SIR, — I arrived here the 23d Aprile, & was much Surprised to find the town Blockaded, by the Asia I suppose Genl Gage will send you an Authentick Coppy of what happened on the 19th I have made the Strictest enquiry amongst the Officers and can assure you upon honor, that not One Shott was fired by any of the troops, till three men at Lexington fired on Our Men a Sergt a Soldier & Major Pitcairns Horse were wounded by those three Shotts, Our Men destroyed Some Gun Carriages, three Guns and some flour at Concord, & no hostilities or rather Shotts were exchanged untill the return of four Companys of Light Infantry who were advanced three miles beyond Concord, on their return, on a Bridge within a mile of Concord they saw two of the Light Infantry extended on the Bridge one of them was Scalped and had his Ears and Nose Cut off tho' not dead, the moment the Light Infantry & Grenadeers began to retreat they were fired on from every House and fense along the Road for fifteen Miles, I cannot commend the behaviour of Our Soldiers on their retreat. As they began to plunder & payed no obedience to their Officers, fortunately for the Grenadeers & Light Infantry Lord Percys Brigade were Ordered Out to support them or the flower of this Army would all have been cut off,

By report they have thirty peices of Cannon and two Mortars at Cambridge, altho' they threaten yet I cannot believe they will raise

Battaries against the Town, if they do I am certain I can take them, the Whigs are all leaving town & such of the Torys as pleases Come in, but they are few, Parties run as high as ever they did in Cromwels time, & was there not a Red Coat in the Country they would cut one anothers throats.

I cannot pretend to say what Our Generals will do, but I think it is in the power of the Congress to prevent the horrors of a civil War

The Colony of Connecticut have sent two of their Assembly with a letter to the General the purport of the letter is to prevent hostilities & hoping a method of pacification may yet be adopted.

I am sorry to hear the Phrenzy of the people has shewn itself in your Province, as a particular mark of distinction was Shewn them in the Fishing Bill I flattered myself they would have been quiet.

The Whigs have plundered the Houses of Judge Auchmuty Col. Vassals, & Hatches, and Captain Lornings, what other devastations they have committed We have not heard.

I am glad to hear you are in good health and I have the honor to be

Dear Sir

your most Obedient humble Servant

JAMES ABERCROMBIE

Lt Col 22d Regt.

P. S. Since writing the above I am appointed Adjutant General.

LT. GOV COLDEN
New York.

To-day for the last time the Historical Society meets in this room, and the occasion seems to justify a few remarks by the sole survivor of the original Building Committee. A full period of twenty-five years has elapsed since the last meeting was held in the former building which stood on this site; and at that time some of the older members indulged in various reminiscences, which are always a prerogative of age. It was then thought that the Society would remain here for an indefinite period, — certainly much longer than the quarter of a century that has since passed; but human judgment is often at fault, and liable to err. At the exercises on the re-opening of the Dowse Library, Mr. Winthrop alluded to the fact that the Society had been in possession of the site for just forty years, and he expressed the hope that another term of at least forty years might still be enjoyed in security; but the exigencies of the times have decreed otherwise, and the estate has now been sold.

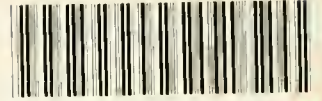


The Dowse room, as we see it to-day, in form and dimensions is the exact counterpart of the corresponding room in the old building, though with a few slight changes in its internal arrangements. The library, here contained, is a collection of choice books of miscellaneous literature, all richly bound in calf or morocco, and comprising 4,665 volumes. No provision for its increase was made by the giver, and for this reason it is not susceptible of growth. In the building soon to be erected, it is the intention of the Committee to reproduce this room again in similar form and of the same dimensions, so that it may still continue as a lasting memorial of Mr. Dowse's generosity. It is hoped that the new building will serve as a home for the Society during a long period of years; but as human hopes are so apt to be disappointing, I shall refrain from prediction.

For some of us the tender associations which crowd this room do not come from mere lapse of time, but from the great and noble men who have sat around the table here, as they were wont to gather either by chance or for some special study. The meetings of the Society have been dignified by the presence of members eminent in all the walks of life,—in literature, statecraft, the arts and sciences, the learned professions, business affairs, and in numerous other pursuits of a scholarly community. It is needless to name them, as their memory is still fresh in our minds.

It seems but a little while ago when the Society was discussing designs for a new structure, and passing through that uncertain state which always precedes the adoption of a final plan, similar to the condition of affairs in which we find ourselves at present, and yet a quarter of a century has elapsed since that time. The four other members of the Building Committee died many years ago, and all within a period of a few weeks more than a year. It may be worthy of note that one of that Committee, Mr. Erastus B. Bigelow, gave the carpet now on this floor, which was the product of one of his own looms at Clinton, and has been in constant use since the Annual Meeting, on April 10, 1873.

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